



AMERICAN LEAGUE TO ABOLISH CAPITAL PUNISHMENT  
MASS. COUNCIL FOR THE ABOLITION OF THE DEATH PENALTY

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FOR RELEASE SUNDAY FEB. 26, 1961

From Mrs. Herbert B. Ehrmann, Pres. MCADP  
Vice Pres., Exec. Director ALACP

To the Editor

Dear Sir,

THE IMAGE OF AMERICA - AND CAPITAL PUNISHMENT

Many State Legislatures will consider proposals to change the laws relating to capital punishment. In Massachusetts a public hearing will be held on Tuesday, Feb. 28 at 11:00 A.M., Room 222, State House, Boston before the Joint Judiciary Committee. At this hearing citizens may let the legislature know their views.

Year after year Judiciary Committees, - who have studied the merits of abolition proposals - have recommended their adoption. Furthermore, the distinguished Massachusetts Legislative Commission appointed in 1957 to investigate this question, after 18 months of intensive study, recommended complete and immediate abolition of capital punishment. Their printed report is used extensively throughout the country as an authoritative document; sections have been reprinted in the Congressional Record and by the Judiciary Committee of Congress.

However, since 1951, the recommendations of these official bodies have failed to persuade the Legislators: the reports have been rejected, capital punishment remains on the statute books.

The Chessman case attracted world attention to Capital Punishment, and anti-capital punishment feeling became intense. During the closing months of the case our State Department requested the Governor of California to delay the execution of Chessman until President Eisenhower had returned from a good-will tour in Latin America. This dramatized the fact that capital punishment in our country has strong adverse international implications and very decidedly affects the "Image of America" in foreign lands.

The Morning Union Leader of Manchester, New Hampshire, March 25, 1960 in praising the California Senate Judiciary Committee for defeating a proposal to abolish capital punishment - by a vote of 8 to 7 - nevertheless recognized the far-reaching damaging effects of our use of the death penalty on world opinion. The editorial refers to the proposal as:

....Coming as it did at a time when a handful of wild-eyed Bolivian Communists can upset the State Department, cause California's Governor to behave in a strange manner, and halt overnight the orderly functioning of American internal law....

Another significant editorial is from the Courier of Evansville, Indiana, July 21, 1959:

.... The U.S. once the living personification of liberty and equality, has been pointed out to the peoples of the world as a place where the color of a man's skin determines the quality of justice he receives.... Certain recent events seem to confirm this to watchers with skin color different from ours and with eyes of a different shape than those of most Americans...

Even our indignation over the execution of Lumumba was denounced by the Interior Minister of Katanga on the basis of our own use of the death penalty. The following is from the Traveler, Boston, Mass., February 13, 1961:

NATIVES KILL LUMUMBA.... Munongo, the Interior Minister insisted the handling of the case was a local matter for provincial authorities.

-3-

Cites U.S. Handling of Executions - He said in this connection that the United States had handled by itself the executions of Sacco and Vanzetti, Julius and Ethel Rosenberg, and Caryl Chessman.... "I only remind you that in these well-known cases, the opinion of the world and high religious authorities asked for grace for the condemned, but in vain. The United States ignored them and considered the matter entirely their own affair....."

American tourists in South America and in many other countries where there is no death penalty report disagreeable experiences and wide-spread resentment against the U.S. because they consider capital punishment barbaric.

The new National Administration in Washington is keenly aware of the urgency of restoring confidence and good-will. Puerto Rico has been selected to act as liaison between the United States and our Latin American neighbors to bring about closer and friendlier relations. Puerto Rico, like most of the other South American countries, has completely abolished capital punishment and has written into her constitution the provision that the death penalty may never again be restored! Our efforts to improve the Latin American image of the United States may be severely handicapped by our retention and use of capital punishment.

During the coming months the Federal Government and many American States will act upon proposals to end the death penalty. Is it not high time for them to take into consideration the crucial importance of the picture of America which our executions are creating in the minds of those people where good-will has become so important in the present world crisis?

(Mrs Hubert B.)

Sara R. Ehrenman

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February 23, 1961

FOR YOUR INFORMATION

The Congress and the States are considering legislation concerning the Death Penalty.

The enclosed press release which indicates the significance of this national debate in terms of world reaction, is sent with best wishes.

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